

LiveNet gets go ahead

LiveNet is a ground breaking project aiming to help people with a learning disability and family carers to develop the skills and knowledge they need to utilise the potential of ICT to make their lives better. It is funded through Big Lottery Fund's Live & Learn Programme.

Recruitment of full-time staff began in June 2009.

IT Can Help volunteers will provide technical support and assistance to disabled people, carers, parents, leaders of ICT clubs, and volunteers recruited within the target community. Unlike the present situation in Northern Ireland where information about the availability of help trickles through to disabled people in an ad hoc manner, our services will be promoted by our partners and the staff of LiveNet. This is expected to result in a sharp increase in requests.

The project will have its own Technical Support and Development Officer and it is anticipated that IT Can Help volunteers will be the next line of support after suppliers withdraw and while volunteers from within the community are being recruited; when established, it is expected that the community volunteers will be the first line of support. While difficult to predict, there may be a situation where IT Can Help's relationship with these community volunteers can be formalised, firstly, by recruiting suitable candidates, and secondly by granting others some form of affiliation that allows access to the repository of knowledge and experience within IT Can Help.

Volunteers will be invited to provide feedback on their involvement in the project.

LiveNet is a partnership between Mencap, Citizens Online, the British Computer Society and IT Can Help, all of whom will be represented on the Project Management Board.



LiveNet Fun Day Omagh

Other news in this issue

IT Can Help Volunteers attend RNIB course

AbilityNet provides guidance on supporting individuals with a learning difficulty

Maria Young talks about her role in IT Can Help

RNIB provides introductory training to IT Can Help Volunteers



Alan (RNIB) demonstrates Zoomtext

'This is the only time you will use the mouse today'

With these chilling words Pat Kerr introduced the IT Can Help Volunteers to the use of computers outside the comfort zone of familiarity. The challenges faced by the visually impaired were brought into solid reality, and the importance of appropriate web design became an experienced fact rather than just an interesting concept.

The half day introductory course was kindly offered by RNIB because it was recognised that a fair proportion of requests to IT Can Help came from visually impaired people, who have much the same problems with computers as anybody but with the added level of complexity brought by the utilisation of specialist screen reading software such as Jaws.

There was also an opportunity to work with Zoomtext (Designed for those with visual impairments like macular degeneration and glaucoma) Zoomtext is a screen magnifier and screen reader that makes computers easier to see, hear, and use.

There wasn't much time left to work with Kurzweil software, software that makes printed or electronic text accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. Linked to a scanner the software speaks text aloud in a variety of natural-sounding voices that can be modified to individual preferences.

The course was attended by volunteers Avril Fairbrother, Maria Young, Ian McDevitt, Malcolm Lees and David Brew. These are some of their thoughts, after the course:

Maria, "I found it enjoyable, beneficial, as it provided me with knowledge/understanding so that I can support blind clients".

Avril, "It was an interesting training session. I was particularly interested in how visually impaired people find their way around websites using special software that reads the headings and contents. It helped me to consider the layout and content of designing a website that is easier to navigate by people with and without visual impairment".

Malcolm, "The course showed how computers can be adapted to help people with visual impairment. The chance to try some of the software tools for ourselves was very useful".

Thanks also to Alan, a long standing RNIB volunteer, who was a big help during the day.

Supporting Individuals with a Learning Difficulty

In May 2009, Ms Vihing Lee of AbilityNet presented a course on Supporting Individuals with a Learning Difficulty, hosted by Disability Action, partners of Switched on Communities. The course provided a wealth of information and, at first impression, a bewildering array of software and adaptations, emphasising the necessity for skill and judgement in making the right choices in individual cases. Talking about choices, one approach described involved the individual with a learning difficulty, working with a tutor, conducting an on-line assessment (available at the AbilityNet web site). This tool permitted the individual to decide on the characteristics of mouse, keyboard, and display that were most appealing.

The range of software applications available is extensive and can be classified as follows, social interaction training, cause and effect, numeracy, literacy, memory and cognition. One of the benefits that were mentioned was, in cases where the characteristics of the learning difficulty include diminished social interaction skills, the individual may more readily interact with a computer.



Terry Hoey, Palmerston Residents Association. Nicola Walker, Switched on Communities. Vihing Lee, AbilityNet (Tutor). Chris Lyttle, Alliance Party



Some of the attendees at the AbilityNet course

Maria Young's story

My name is Maria Young and I joined IT Can Help in 2007. I joined IT Can Help because I am passionate about assisting disabled clients with their IT requirements. Last year I was pleased to accept the role of County Coordinator for County Antrim and in this role I have striven to promote the objectives of IT Can Help by publicizing the scheme in libraries and other public venues and by forming relationships with other interested bodies, particularly the Cedar Foundation and The Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

I have always been inspired by writer, John Wesley who said:

*Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.*

My work with ITCH has helped me to develop my communication skills; it has opened up new opportunities and challenges, my experience has enabled me to diversify and integrate with other voluntary organizations within my community; I have made new friends with like minded people; I enjoy my role, it's exciting, fulfilling and fun; I have gained confidence; It has influenced my career choice and I now am applying for positions because I have gained experience; IT Can Help has improved my job prospects and employability.



Maria Young

To request assistance from the IT Can Help call the AbilityNet helpline freephone (and Minicom) on: 0800 269545 or e-mail: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk. More information can be found at www.itcanhelp.org.uk

To unsubscribe to this newsletter, send an email with 'unsubscribe' as the subject to nireland@itcanhelp.org.uk

To have your IT and disabled related story considered for publication in this newsletter, please send it to nireland@itcanhelp.org.uk